

**NOW IS
THE TIME
TO KNOW
EVERY
THING ***



***A STORY ABOUT A MISCARRIAGE
SIMON MORETON**



NOW IS THE TIME TO KNOW EVERYTHING

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An Excerpt



Simon Moreton



ONE

When I was little, I used to think that I could see atoms, like the Big Man himself.

I didn't tell anyone, because I thought that seeing the fabric of the universe was not something I was supposed to be able to do, and that peeking behind the veil might get me in trouble, like being caught throwing stones or looking through the crack in the bedroom door.

My power worked a little like this: if I either closed my eyes very tightly until all the purples and pinks and fireworks got really intense, or simply stared into the middle distance long enough, all this magical dotty frogspawn would pop into view.

It always behaved the same way: the frogspawn would do a little spiral, like it was in a pond eddy, then swoop to the right and up and back on itself and then be gone, and I'd have to start the whole process all over again.

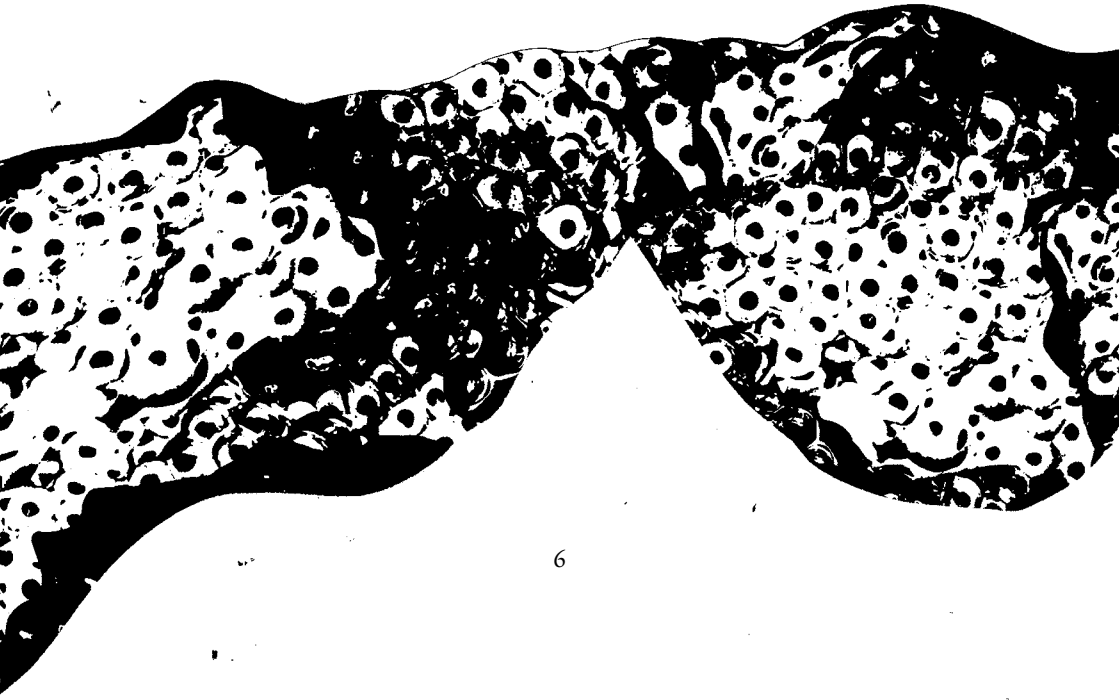
I ended up thinking about this when I was on the bus into town one day earlier this year. It was just before you came along.

I had been resting my forehead on the glass, and it had been bounce-bump-thumping gently on the window in time with the suspension. I was just watching the world go by; seagulls circling very high over the carcass of a biffa bin out east; a teenage boy with a bum-fluff moustache flexing his biceps in the window of a closed kebab shop, nodding in agreement with what he saw reflected back; a man sitting in the street on a white plastic garden chair while another man tidied his neckline with a cutthroat razor;

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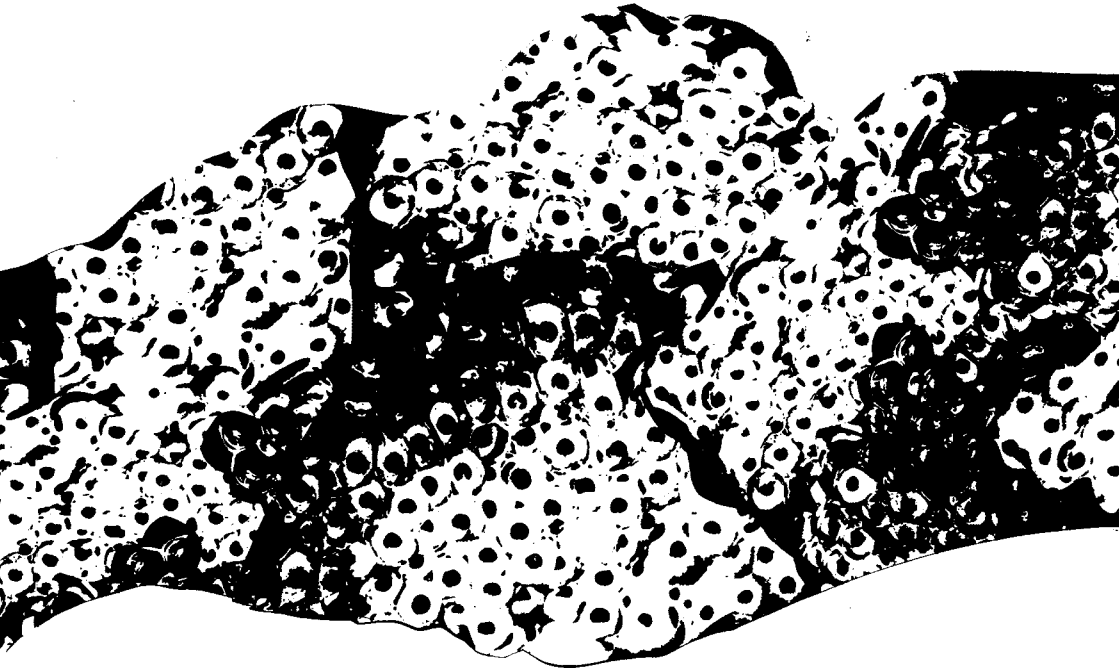
a sign in the halal butchers' window - cow foot cow foot cow foot on sale; an older woman presenting a bunch of scraggly carnations to a stranger because the stranger had jokingly said you shouldn't have! when she first saw the flowers sticking out the older woman's trolley basket, and the old lady then insisting that the other woman take them, saying if they'll bring joy to your day, you should have them and the stranger accepting them while wearing an enormous grin, this whole exchange witnessed through an open window on the top deck of the bus while at a stop.

Then I saw a man who had this look on his face and suddenly I remembered the dots and I imagined that the look on his face was pretty much what my own face would look like if I was trying to see them, a sort of frowny cross-eyed gaze, and it made me think, I wonder if I can still see them, and so I took my head from the windowpane, put my eyes out of focus and started the process, hoping to see these old friends that I had forgotten about almost entirely until that moment with the cross-eyed man.



That's what I was doing when there came the honk of someone requesting attention from their car, a ding of someone requesting a stop on the bus, and the sharp fizzle of brakes.

The bus lurched to a halt and I smacked my head on the seat in front of me and I saw stars, but no dots, while the couple sat behind me started to talk about the weather.



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‘Remember when we were on holiday,’ said the woman to the man, ‘and that couple had that awful row in the hotel bar? When was that?’

‘It can’t have been then, that was a nice summer, and when we were in that hotel it was such a wet weekend wasn’t it? No wonder they were at each other’s throats, all that time indoors, but really, what a display. No, no definitely not that year - maybe the year after?’

‘Oh, I don’t know; where *does* the time go?’

People here liked talking about the weather. It was a national pastime.

Just the day before, Jim who ran the cornershop near our house, and who's name definitely wasn't Jim, had remarked on a recent bit of rain after a hot spell, cooler isn't it, me saying I nearly ran out and danced in that rain, him laughing, a hard man to make laugh, Jim.

In these recent years it had been even harder to avoid this predilection. There was always weather to be commented upon.

Every year, there had been reshuffles. Just last year, they sacked November, and replaced it with March. August was demoted to May. September had been steadily improving its performance, giving June a run for its money, but they had to fire December and replace it with January.

A bullying wind had moved into a house-share down the road the previous April with a bunch of its mates, troubling the locals and upsetting the pot plants. Almost every month they got drunk on weather systems and came out and knocked everything over. Our greenhouse suffered in particular. It had perspex panes and the wind and its friends would come along, pry them from the frame and toss them around. They'd be left flapping across the garden like beached fish; they often ended up in the pond like drunk men in jacuzzis.

One February the wind came up very strong again, gusts that broke the fence, and cancelled the buses and the trains and closed workplaces and collapsed trees and blew away bins.

In Folkestone when it was too warm at Easter and I hadn't been there in thirty years despite it being the first place I'd been outside of my home, a few weeks old, some forty years ago, on this visit changing into my shorts in the public toilets trying to keep

my clothes and dignity off the pissy floor, leaning against the wall of the cubicle next to a stainless steel toilet blocked with tissue, children getting changed in another cubicle, a dad shouting come on hurry up the sun's out; then later, on the beach and a holidaying man in a heavy overcoat and boots coming up to me, paddling, and asking if I'd fill a bucket with water for his daughter, and I said yes, and him saying thanks, shyly, then it's hot isn't it? Then later again, down by the old funicular, when I could smell the rain on the easterly wind, looking like it might drizzle a bit, I heard a family nearby, James, put on your coat, please, no Mum I don't want to, James don't be difficult, it's going to rain. It didn't rain.

With June came the sweaty groans of a jobsworth summer. An Autumn tang entered the air in July, a short-lived relief that was soon dispatched by the arrival of August and a pack of dog days trailing another yellow-grassed tinder box heatwave.

The prevailing wisdom in the press was to enjoy the heat as, we were expected to infer, it was actually a statement of patriotic camaraderie thank you very much. Red and white shorts, bare red and white chest. No sunscreen. HOT HOT HOT Brits bask in hottest day since records began as Met Office says we've hit 40.3C with 1000s packing beaches to enjoy heatwave! Employees say it's 'TOO HOT to work': Hairdressers cancel appointments, workers say commute is 'too sticky' and woke HR bosses say people should get 'sunny days' OFF with temperatures set to hit 91F (but others rise early and head straight to the beach)!

Cor, it's a scorcher!

It was one day in June, amid all that hot weather, that we found out about you.

I was in Cardiff at a work conference, while your mum was at home in Bristol. She sent me a photograph of the two blue lines.

Understandably it became hard for me to concentrate on what was happening for the rest of the day - tiny sandwiches, mediocre coffee, and professional chit-chat with near strangers losing their appeal, stuff which, normally, I would admit to having enjoyed complaining about. Instead, all I could think about was the fact there was this great big space in my head all of a sudden, my brain an inflating balloon that was getting bigger and bigger but which contained no clear thoughts other than,

‘Oh wow this is quite something.’

When I got home, your mum and I went walking in the park. Although the heat had dropped and a breeze was coming up from the wooded river valley by the little lake, you could tell it had been sweltering not an hour earlier, the air thick with droopy cow parsley fug, nostrils in a tizz, clammy hands.

What next? we asked each other.

It's happening!

A green woodpecker laughed its way into a tall tree in the graveyard, noisy thing, looking for tea.

My eyes stung with hayfever, and fear, and excitement.

The next day, it was hot again.

There were storms. Lightning! Thunder!
At the supermarket checkout:
'Hiya.'
'Hi.'
'Do you need a hand with your packing?'
'No thanks, we're all good.'
'Loud thunder just now.'
Boop boop.
'Yeah it was!'
Boop boop.
Boop boop.
'I like storms. Shame I have to work tonight.'
Boop boop.
'Weren't you meant to be here?'
'Nah, it's an emergency shift. They called me up like two hours ago or something. Not got enough staff.'
'Oh at least everyone won't be outside having fun.'
'I would be. I like thunderstorms. They're really interesting.'
'Did you see the lightning last night?'
'No... I think I was asleep. I was probably facing the wrong way.'
Boop boop.

NOW IS THE TIME...

A week or two later, we went to Birmingham, hanging out amongst the empty buildings and canals. The air was drugged with buddleia.

At this point our news was A Secret and so we couldn't tell anyone, early nights and no booze, thankful of the subterfuge because frankly we weren't sure how to talk about it with anyone else anyway.

Although not without its worries and anxieties and questions, this new circumstance allowed things to fall into place. We knew about the risks, of course, and tried to not get too invested, but it was hard. The idea of you had taken root, but because you were A Secret, we just talked to people about the weather instead.

THREE

Did you know that the summer your mum and I met, we both had to go away just after we got together - her to America and me to France? It was hot that year, too.

Once I got to Paris, I had bailed on my conference early, and spent my time in the city. I hung out in the Jardin des Plantes because your mum had told me to. I drew the flamingos.

After that I must have walked up and down the Left Bank a dozen times for want of anything better to do.

Someone tried to get me to sponsor someone and then take my money under the Eiffel Tower. I didn't fall for the scam, and they were visibly upset.

I took a video of some crows with my phone. I was in love but I hadn't realised. It was very hot - did I mention that?

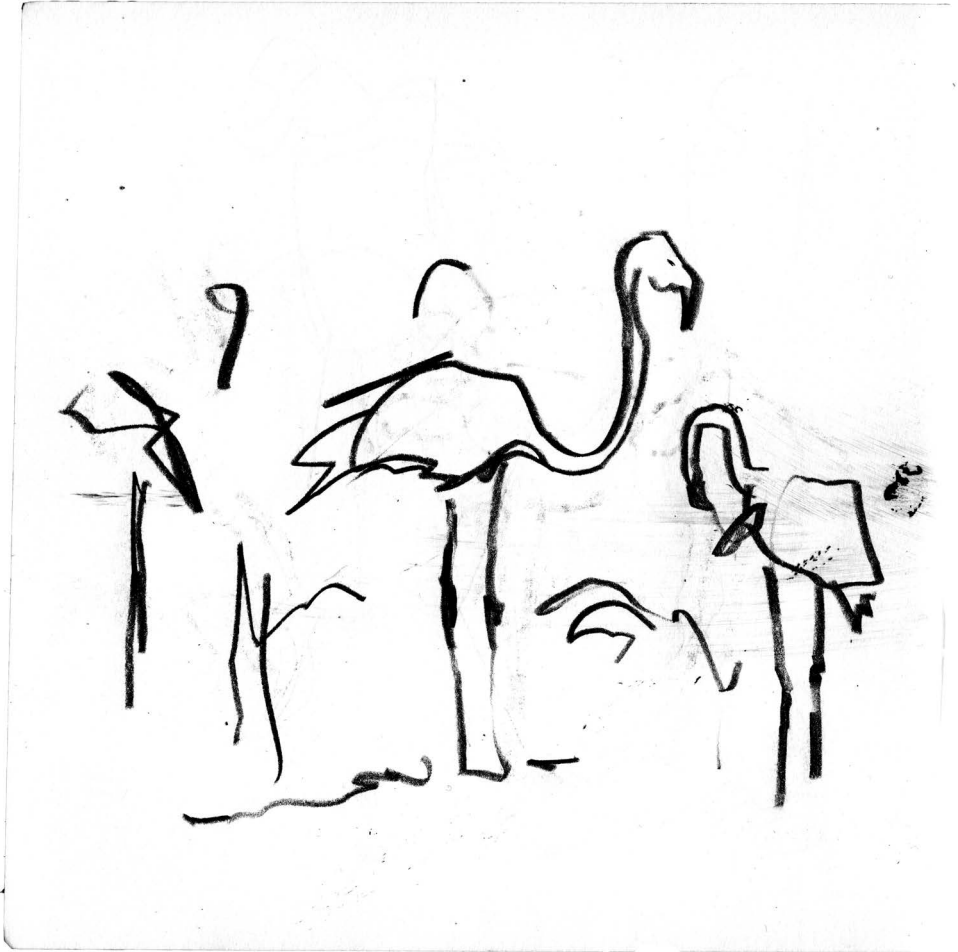
For lunch, I perched awkwardly alone on a pavement chair outside a cafe, too nervous to order food instead relying on the crisps that came with the beers I was drinking. I read the same page of my book two dozen times.

Later that night I was sitting outside a bar opposite Gare du Lyon, when everything erupted around me. It was the World Cup and France had done something. The taxi drivers were honking and the people were cheering. You could feel the joy in the hot air.

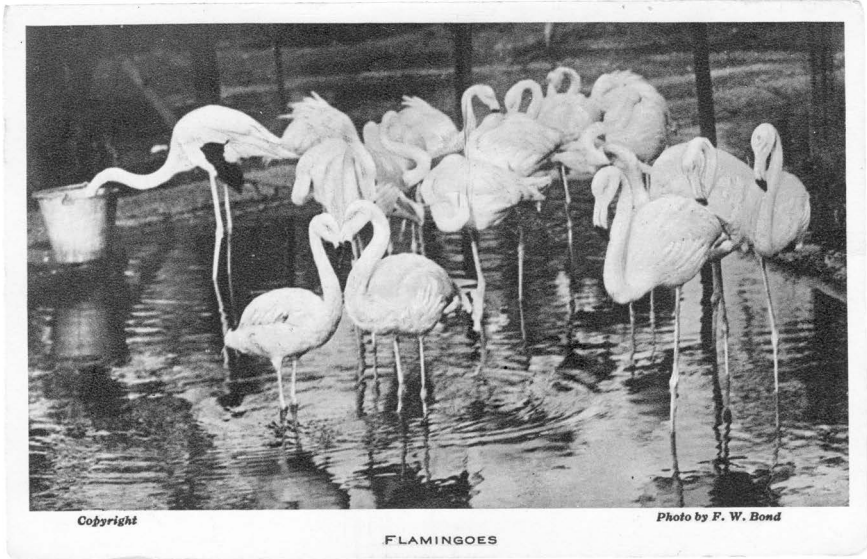
I spoke in bad German to an older couple at the table next to me. Five nil to France, they said, fünf null, I thought of your mum in America, me in France.

How was I so lonely and so happy all at once?

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Dad joke:

Someone told me I was acting like a flamingo
- so I had to put my foot down.

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I think I've seen flamingos in the wild only once, at dawn, somewhere in the south of Spain, Salinas de Santa Pola, stood motionless in a delta seemingly only inches deep but as wide as the world. This was before your mum and I met - a difficult time in my life - but I remember them quite vividly, their upside-down counterparts proud in the rainbow splash of sunrise.

Nowadays, our wading birds came in the form of the birds down on the lake in the park.

It may sound less exotic, but it really wasn't. There were mallards, the odd mandarin, flights of kingfishers, and herons, all accompanied by the pneumatic punctuation of coots and the slap of moorhen feet on the pavement, and god knows how much poo left by the Canada geese as they pulled at the nearby grass. The swans hissed and preened at dusk, and in winter, cormorants gathered in the upper reaches of a naked beech tree, like dinosaurs.

On the lake bed, in the right light, you could see these big shells, freshwater pearl mussels, but what they were doing there is anyone's guess. Fat fish with fulsome lips would sunbathe just below the surface in the summertime. Once we saw a pike lurking cool as a two-foot long cucumber, waiting for lunch.

This year, we took to sitting on one of the benches by the lake to watch the bats at twilight. Sometimes they came so close we could hear their crisp packet wings.

One night, while watching the bats, we heard a noise in the undergrowth. We went over to investigate and a badger barrelled like a tank across your mum's feet.

In the daytime, we watched children feeding the birds.

...TO KNOW EVERYTHING



NOW IS THE TIME...



One night, when sleeping was hard because of the heat,
I furnace-dreamed of a day where it rained and it rained and it
rained and it rained and it rained and it rained and it rained and
it rained and it rained and it rained and it rained and it rained and
it rained and it rained and it rained and it rained and it rained and
it rained and it rained and it rained and it rained and it rained and
and it rained and it rained and then it stopped and the sun came
out mustard grey, and the air was foetid and everything dripped,
even the bricks wept, and the gutters percussed, and then the sky
became bilious and again it rained and it rained and it rained and
it rained and it rained and it rained and it rained and it rained and
it rained and it rained and it rained and it rained and it rained and
it rained and it rained and it rained and it rained and it rained and
it rained and it rained and it rained and it rained and it rained and
it rained and it rained and it rained and it rained and it rained and
the weir stopped being a weir and vanished under the flow and it
rained and it rained and it rained and the path between the lake
and the river vanished, chubby carp floating out of the lake, into
the river, taking a holiday.

I stood on the dissolving shore.

'Don't forget the orange juice!' your mum called from the lake,
bobbing in a boat, you in her happy arms.

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SNUFF MILLS AND EASTVILLE LAKE RESCUE

“It has been disclosed that yesterday a baby broke away from its parents and rolled down the bank into the water at the old quarry, Snuff Mills, Stapleton.

“Mrs F. J. Gifford, of Derwent Road, Speedwell, waded into the water and rescued the child with the assistance of a girl of 13, Lily Edgell, also of Derwent Road. Owing to the prompt rescue the child was not much the worse for the adventure.

“Mrs Williams, of 50, Berkeley Street, Eastville, also writes thanking the gentleman who pulled her little boy from Eastville Lake on Friday afternoon of the week previous.”

Western Daily Press, Wednesday 31st May 1939

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A portion of the proceeds from this edition will be donated to the Miscarriage Association who offer support and information to anyone affected by the loss of a baby in pregnancy, raise awareness of issues around miscarriage, and promote good practice in medical care.

<https://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/>